

*The Excellency of the Knowledge of
Christ.*

Represented in a

S E R M O N

Preached at

Haberdasher's - Hall,

NOVEMBER 10, 1752.

T O T H E

CHARITABLE SOCIETY

F O R

Promoting RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE among
the POOR.

By *SAMUEL CHANDLER.*

Published at the Request of the SOCIETY.

*Christum scimus sapientiam. Hic thesaurus in agro Scripturarum nascitur. Hæc gemma multis emitur margaritis.
—Christus omnia, ut qui omnia propter Christum dimiserit, unum inveniat pro omnibus, et possit libere proclamare. Pars mea Dominus. Hieron. ad Pammach. super obitu Paulin. uxoris.*

L O N D O N,

Printed for JOHN NOON, at the *White Hart* in *Cheapside*,
and ROBERT WHITWORTH, at the *Feathers* in the
Poultry. 1753.

The Excellency of the Knowledge of
Gospel.

Reprinted in a

SEERMON

Preached at

Flowerdew's Hall,

November 10. 1753.

TO THE

CHARITABLE SOCIETY



Promoting Religion and
the Poor.

By SAMUEL CHANDLER.

Printed at the Sign of the Anchor.

Charitable Society, in the Strand, near
St. Dunstons Church. The Society was
founded in the Year 1729, and has
since that Time, continued to promote
the Relief of the Poor, and the
Propagation of the Gospel.

L O N D O N.

Printed for John Noon, at the Sign of the Anchor,
and Robert Warrington, at the Sign of the
Pillar. 1753.



PHILIP. iii. 7: 8.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.



T. Paul having laid it down as an essential part of the character of a sincere christian, *That he worshipped God in the Spirit*, with inward affection and purity of heart, that *he rejoiced in Christ Jesus*, in the invaluable priviledges in which he was interested through the knowledge of and faith in him, and *had no confidence in the flesh*, placed no dependence for acceptance and salvation on those ritual external observances of the law, which were mere bodily operations; gives in this remarkable passage an account of the high value he had for christianity himself, and the blessings attending it, and of the strong and passionate desire that possessed him, of securing to himself an interest in them. *What things were gain to me, these I counted loss for Christ*: The things I once esteemed my greatest glory and advantage, the priviledges I once valued myself on the possession of, *these I*
B *have*

Ver. 3.

have counted loss for Christ ; am so far from looking on myself as a gainer by them, as that if I forsook the gospel foundation of hope, and trusted to and depended on these only for justification and life ; I know I should hereby become an unspeakable loser. Yea doubtless I also count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. In speaking to these words, I shall

- I. Shew you wherein this knowledge of Christ consists.
- II. Set before you the unparalleled excellency of it.
- III. Apply it suitable to the present occasion.

I. I am to shew you what that knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is, which the Apostle speaks of. In general it implies, the knowledge of every thing revealed *by Christ*, and revealed *concerning him*.

1. It implies the knowledge of all those great and interesting truths, which have been revealed by Christ, either such as were *wholly* unknown before, or but *partially* understood, or *blended with mistakes* of importance, or attended with great *uncertainty* and doubt, and which as clearly taught, either by his own personal instructions on earth, or by his apostles after him, under his direction, and by the inspiration of that spirit of truth, which for this purpose he liberally communicated to them, may well be termed *the peculiar doctrines* of the gospel.

1. And here, as the great object of all religion is the infinitely perfect God, the Creator, Proprietor, Lord and Governour of the worlds visible and invisible, the knowledge of him is included

cluded in the knowledge of Christ. *For 'tis God,* ^{2 Cor.} *who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,* ^{iv. 6.} *who hath shone into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory, or the glorious knowledge of God, in the face, or by the person of Jesus Christ.* Our Lord tells us; *all things are delivered to me of my Father, and no man knows the* ^{Matt.xi.} *Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* For though the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament shews his handy work, and his eternal power and godhead may be clearly collected from the things that are made; yet it is the doctrine of Christ alone that can lead us to form those just sentiments of him, that are of the highest importance to us, and necessary to direct us into the way of our duty and happiness.

And how great and interesting are the discoveries made concerning God by the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in how glorious and amiable a light is he hereby represented to us! It not only establishes that great truth of his being the universal Creator, but informs us of what the light of reason could never have traced out, that *by his word* he created all things that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers; so that without him was not any thing made, that was made. It asserts the reality and constancy of his providence, that its extent is universal, to every object that exists, the fowls of the air, the grass of the field, our very stature, and the hairs of our head, and to every kind of event that can happen throughout the whole creation; and describes it as particularly watchful over and friendly to the sincerely religious and good. It sets before us the perfections of his nature in the noblest view; cloaths him with the majesty of an un-

spotted holyness, makes justice and judgment the habitation of his throne, and dwells peculiarly on the riches of his grace, his tender compassions, and never failing mercies towards sinful man, reconciling his hatred of sin with the grant of pardon to the sinner, and representing his righteousness, so as that both characters may unite in him, of being *just, and the justifier of the sinner that believes in Jesus.*

And as there is nothing of greater importance to us, than the knowledge of the purposes of God, relating to the state of sinners, and his own conduct towards them; as this is that part of knowledge which 'tis impossible should be attained to, without immediate revelation from himself; so 'tis the peculiar glory of the doctrine of Christ, that it gives us the clearest instructions concerning it, and discovers to us those eternal counsels and resolutions of God, upon which all the the interests of our future eternal existence depend. For by this we are informed in the nature of that

1 Cor. ii. 7. *wisdom of God, that was hidden in a mystery, concealed in the impenetrable counsels of God, as a mysterious secret from the princes and great ones of the earth, which neither the Jewish priests and rulers were acquainted with, nor any of the kings, philosophers and wise men amongst the Gentiles were ever initiated into, but which God ordained before the world was to the glory of the apostles, i. e. purposed to reveal to them, to do honour to their mission and ministry; and by them to all, who should believe and receive their gospel; which purpose he formed before the foundations of the world. And the wisdom which God thus determined to reveal, consisted in the knowledge of his eternal counsels, relating to the election of sinners to salvation, through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth; their justification*
by

by grace through faith ; their adoption as children into the family of God ; their having redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, according to those riches of the grace of God, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence ; their being sealed with the holy spirit of promise, as the earnest of their inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory ; the gathering together, in the dispensation of the fulness of time, all things in one, even in Christ, the things in heaven, and those on earth, the angels of God, and the believing Jews and Gentiles on earth, constituting them one family and household, united in Christ as their common head ; the high and heavenly hope to which he hath called us, those riches of glory which he will hereafter bestow upon his saints, as their final and distinguishing inheritance ; and the mighty power which he will hereafter exert, in raising them from the dead, and making them partakers of life and immortality ; and finally, that *indignation and wrath, that tribulation and anguish*, that shall be the portion of all the unbelieving and impenitent part of mankind, when as the consequence of an impartial judgment before the tribunal of Christ, *they shall be punished with an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*

And that no part of knowledge might be wanting, any way useful and necessary to us, either for the comfort of our minds, or the direction of our conduct ; by this knowledge of Christ, we farther understand the nature of that genuine and acceptable worship *in spirit and in truth*, which is due to God, and which he requires, and as to which the world was in a state of the deepest possible ignorance ; placing it wholly in external
pomp

pomp and ceremony, in splendid offerings and costly sacrifices, in useless superstitions, in absurd and impious idolatries, in every thing but that wherein it really consisted, and which alone could be available in the sight of God. But the knowledge of Christ banishes all these kinds of pagantries and impieties from the house of God, consecrates the man himself into a temple and habitation of God through the spirit, sanctifies the heart into a pure and worthy altar, demands the immediate attendance of our noblest powers, as the sacred ministers that are to bring all our offerings to God, calls for the exercise of the best and devoutest affections to accompany us to the throne of grace, points out the sacrifices we are to present before it, those spiritual and truly noble ones of prayer and praise, of broken and contrite hearts, of righteousness, benevolence and charity, with which God is well pleased ; thus rendering the worship of God simple and unmixed, as the simplicity of his being, rational and spiritual as his nature, and pure and uncorrupt as his own infinite and adorable rectitude.

And what is closely connected with this farther is, that the knowledge of Christ includes in it the knowledge of the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, in every necessary and important article of our duty, in the whole extent and compass of it. For the gospel revelation places God at the head of the whole reasonable creation, represents all men, of every nation, rank and condition, as the immediate subjects of his kingdom and government, declares his will to be the supream rule and measure of their conduct, and sets before them in a clear and comprehensive view, every thing that he requires of them, and what he would have them to do, in order to the perfection of their nature, and to create and
strengthen

strengthen in them the necessary disposition for their final happiness. So that there is no relation, or circumstance of life, in which we are to act as accountable creatures, and upon our right conduct in which the divine approbation hath any dependence, in which the knowledge of Christ will not teach us to behave with a becoming propriety and dignity, and in which it doth not discover to us the duties resulting from them, and expected by God from us. So that by the knowledge of Christ we learn the whole scheme of God's moral conduct towards men, in the dispensations of his mercy and justice towards them, throughout the whole extent of their duration; what they are to believe, how they are to act in the present life, what they have to hope, what to fear, how they shall be disposed of, and what great events await them in the world to come, from the pleasure and resolutions of God that made them. And undoubtedly, this is one of the principal circumstances that enhances the value of this knowledge of Christ, in that wherever it dwells, it gives the clearest view of this most glorious and excellent being, represents him to our minds in the purest light, and in so perspicuous a glory, in every part of his character which, in duty or interest, we are concerned to understand, as tends to raise in us the highest reverence and fear, the warmest gratitude and affection to him, the most pleasing hope and confidence in him, the most absolute submission of soul to his pleasure, the most fervent desires after him, and the strongest ambition of being approved and accepted by him; and in a word, all those sacred and worthy sentiments, affections and dispositions of genuine and undisssembled piety, in which the life and power of real godliness consist, and which are indispensably

sibly necessary preparations for our future admission into his presence and glory. But,

Juvenal,
Sat. II.
v. 27.

2. Another part of very useful knowledge, that we may gather by the knowledge of Christ, is the knowledge of *ourselves*. This part of science was by the antient sages thought of that importance, as that the maxim, *Know thyself*, was said to have descended from heaven, and so to carry in it the force even of a divine command. And indeed what can be more necessary, since he who is destitute of this part of knowledge, can scarce be said rightly to understand any thing else, must want the disposition necessary to discharge the most essential duties of his being, must be ignorant of his highest interest and happiness, and a stranger to the most effectual methods of obtaining it. Wouldst thou therefore be well acquainted with thyself, and know whence, and what thou art, what is the design of thy being, what the proper use of thy reasonable powers and faculties, what thy duration, and for what future existence intended; learn of Christ, submit to him as thy instructor, and draw thy information from that pure and uncorrupted source of truth, which he hath opened for thy benefit. Hence thou wilt learn, what nothing else can teach thee, and see thyself in that clear and impartial light, in which nothing besides can represent thee.

Here we learn, that man's original was from God, who formed his body out of the dust, and breathed into him a reasonable and immortal spirit, and that therefore we are in our intire composition his offspring; and that therefore God's property in us is supream and unalterable, and that we ought not to arrogate to ourselves any right of self-disposal, contrary to and inconsistent with his primary and unalienable right in us.

Here

Here we are informed of the original state of honour and happiness, in which God at first created man; that he was made after the image of God, in the excellent powers of his reasonable nature, and in a state of moral perfection and rectitude, and on both these accounts but a little lower than the angels; that he was formed on purpose for and capable of converse and communion with God, the knowledge of his perfections, the contemplation of his works, the exalted services of piety and true goodness, the honour of his approbation, the satisfactions that arise from the consciousness of pleasing him, and the supreme happiness that flows from his acceptance and favour.

Hence also we are acquainted with the fall of man, the genuine causes of it, and the misery into which he hath brought himself as the consequence of it; the gospel revelation tracing it up to its proper original, the common parents of the human race, and shewing that it was from them propagated in its dreadful effects throughout their whole posterity. It discovers to us the immediate effect of the original lapse, in the loss of the divine favour, the corruption of their nature, the forfeiture of life, and their exclusion from that happy mansion in which God their former at first placed them.

It represents to us the universal spread of this corruption throughout all their descendants, in their intemperate passions, their disordered affections, their criminal habits, and their numerous offences against God; by means of which the glory is departed from them, the image of God defaced, an impotence, inability, and even disaffection and hatred to what is good contracted and strengthened, the high displeasure of God incurred, and all men become liable to the dreadful sentence of condemnation and death; a condition

this, out of which no created power and wisdom could ever extricate us, or prevent the unhappy fruits and effects of.

But it is our comfort, that this knowledge of Christ leads us to the knowledge of ourselves, not only in the causes, nature and greatness of our misery, but in the most effectual means of our recovery and salvation from it, and restoration to all the forfeited priviledges of our nature; how we may arise out of the corruption and death of sin, break off the habits, and shake off the dominion of it, overcome all temptations to commit it, recover our impaired strength and ability to that which is good, regain that image of God in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, that sin hath defaced, and that capacity for the original happiness that sin hath destroyed; and in consequence of this, how we may escape the condemnation of sin, guard ourselves against all the effects of the divine displeasure, be restored to peace and friendship with our offended God, interested in him as our reconciled God and Father, secure our recovery from death, obtain a resurrection to forfeited life, and find out a firm and substantial title to immortal life and blessedness. As the gospel revelation faithfully represents to us on the one hand, the misery of our condition by sin, without flattering our pride, humouring our prejudices, or palliating the real state of our case; as it gives in a clear and honest mirror, our true image, and genuine picture as sinners; so on the other, thanks be to the riches of the grace of God, it as faithfully and clearly points out to us, how we may be saved from this complicated ruin, and reinvested with all the glorious and incorruptible priviledges of the children of God. Indeed the great intention of Christ's doctrine, in convincing us of sin, is to recover us
from

from the power of it, and it shews us our misery, only to render us duly solicitous to escape it. And in this view even the discovery of wretchedness is a substantial benefit, nor can any one repine at being shewn the deepness of his ruin, when that conviction is kindly intended only as a necessary mean, to render him seriously concerned what he must do to be saved.

And as that salvation is the most valuable in itself, and most worthy our regard and pursuit, which points out to us our chief good and highest happiness, 'tis a farther proof of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, that it leads us to the most certain knowledge of this important article, what is the great end of our being, and wherein the true felicity of our nature consists; not in things visible and temporal, earthly riches, secular honour and power, sensual pleasures and gratifications, nor any thing that relates merely to our bodies, and the transitory interests of them, the present world, and the precarious advantages and blessings it affords us; but in such as relate to our spiritual and incorruptible principle, are capable of satisfying its desires, supplying its wants, feeding its pleasures, and becoming to it a perpetual and incorruptible source of good; and that therefore the soul must rise above all created perfection, terminate its views and best affections on the living and eternal God, choose and rest in him as its only inheritance and felicity, who is the indefectible fountain, the everflowing spring, the incorruptible original of all perfection and blessedness, and derive its proper satisfaction, its ultimate felicity and supream happiness from the contemplation of his glory, an assimilation to his purity, an admission into his presence, and the everlasting enjoyment of him as its portion and exceeding great reward.

Oh excellent and desirable knowledge! *the merchandize of which is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than of fine gold*; without which all other parts of science are but useless speculations, and unprofitable amusements, that neither thoroughly polish the mind, nor in the most useful instances improve it, that can open no sources of solid pleasure, furnish it only with precarious and delusive satisfactions, too often inspire vanity, self-sufficiency, presumption and pride, introduce false hopes, and insecure dependences, but minister little or nothing to the genuine perfection of our nature, or to encrease and strengthen the proper and necessary disposition for true happiness. But to know human nature and ourselves, as the knowledge of Christ represents us, is to understand ourselves as we really are, to have a clear view of our condition void of all art and disguise, and in a word to be informed of every thing relating to ourselves, that is necessary to teach us to *think soberly* of our character and condition, to guard us against the foibles and imperfections that encompass us, to lead us to act in every instance of our conduct with the truest propriety and dignity, to direct us into the view of our own best interest, to animate us in the pursuit of it, and raise in us the most grateful sentiments towards that kind and generous friend, to whose ministry we owe the clear discoveries of all those sacred truths, that are so ornamental and beneficial to all who are enlightened with them, and with whom to be acquainted comprehends in it every other part of necessary knowledge, and leads to the most durable and valuable felicity. *For this is life eternal,*

John xvii.
3.

says our Lord himself, *to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* And this leads me,

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2. To the second thing, which is to consider this knowledge of Christ, as it respects himself, and regards him *personally* as the immediate object of it. That the apostle includes this as a principal branch of the knowledge of Christ, is evident from what he immediately adds: *That I may be* Ver. 9.
found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. And indeed this part of the knowledge of Christ is so necessary, as that nothing else in christianity can be thoroughly understood without it; every part of the scheme of redemption having a reference to him, and being carried on and to be finally perfected by his mediation. 10.

Now this knowledge consists in the right apprehension of the original essential dignity and glory of his person, his being from the beginning as *the word with God*, and himself God, with and by and from him, *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, in the form of God*, and invested with a divine glory in his bosom, and in the nearest union with him from before the foundation of the world, and *creating all things that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities and powers, insomuch that without him was not any thing made that was made*; and therefore being himself before all things, and all things consisting by him, and being upheld by the word of his power; by all which descriptions he is himself evidently exempted from the rank and condition of a creature; since he who

who was from the beginning, the only begotten of the Father, before all other things, and the maker of every thing that was made, could not be one of those things, which were produced after him, and that were created by him. And this consideration of his divine glory, and the essential dignity of his person, throws an importance and majesty on the whole christian scheme, connects all its parts, heightens the efficacy of his mediation, and will account for that solemn adoration that is paid him by the angels round the throne of God, the beasts and the elders, in number ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; all of them with one heart and voice, saying with a loud voice: *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* Yea, what is still more amazing is, that the whole creation without exception, every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, in the same breath as it were, with the same acknowledgments, and in the same terms of adoration, unite him with his Father on the throne, saying: *Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.* And this joint ascription appears to me so very extraordinary, so majestick and awful, as that I could not easily be reconciled to believe it part of a divine revelation, if the Lamb had no real characters of proper divinity belonging to him, or was only a creature, though of the highest rank and order; nor reconcile it with that plain declaration of God by the inspired prophet: *I am Jehovah, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another.* But this is not a place for the full illustration of this

Revel. v.
11, 12, 13.

Isaiah lxii.
8.

this particular. It is time I should observe farther:

That this knowledge of Christ comprises in it the knowledge of his humiliation and grace, in really *emptying himself* of that *form of God*, in which he was with his Father from everlasting, in being *made flesh*, or becoming a real man, dwelling or tabernacling amongst us, *made of no reputation*, taking on him the form of a servant, and *made in the likeness of men*; that by this incarnation he might become the link as it were between God and man, sustaining the persons, and careful of the interests of both; that he might be capable of conversing with men, and mediating with sure success for them with God his Father; of declaring to them his Father's will, by having the most absolute and perfect knowledge of it himself; of doing those miracles which none could do except one, who was *in the Father and the Father in him*; of giving that example, which besides the perfection of it, might have a divine authority to enforce and recommend it; of revealing those truths, which must come from God as their original; of conferring those substantial and eternal benefits, which 'tis the proper prerogative of God to bestow; of suffering and dying, and adding a proper value and efficacy to those sufferings; and of receiving those honours as the reward of them, which in my judgment appear too sacred and divine to be bestowed on any creature, but not too great for God to bestow upon his only son, who was his perfect image, by whom he made the worlds, nor to be given him by those who were created by his power, fashioned by his wisdom, and redeemed by his all-powerful mediation and intercession for them.

Besides this the knowledge of Christ implies a competent acquaintance with that work and service

vice which he transacted when he dwelt on earth, and conversed with men, when his glory shone out and was beheld as *the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*; as he came to reveal, and bear testimony to the truth, truth of the highest importance, relating to his heavenly Father, his mercy, his eternal counsels, his will, his promises, and the disposals of his grace and justice in the great events of a future world; as he was sent to lay the foundations of a spiritual kingdom, and to restore the dominion of God over mankind, by rescuing them from ignorance, the slavery of sin, the tyranny of apostate spirits, the guilt they had contracted, and the condemnation they had deserved; by introducing the pure worship of God in the room of superstition and idolatry, and teaching genuine and undefiled religion in the room of those horrid corruptions that had usurped the place of it; by raising men to the dignity, rectitude and perfection of their nature, by clearly discovering and strongly enforcing the obligations of moral righteousness, by diffusing the most extensive goodness, humanity, benevolence and friendship, by calling men to love and practice truth, fidelity, purity in word and action, moderation, temperance, humility, meekness, forbearance, condescension, and in a word, the whole collection of divine and human virtues, every thing that is venerable, lovely, of good report and praise-worthy; as he was sent to inspire men with the hopes of forgiveness and reconciliation with God, to call sinners to repentance, and thus to seek and save them that were lost, to acquaint them with the powers of the life to come, to encourage them by the promise of a glorious resurrection, to open heaven to their prospect, and bring the happiness of it within their reach, and to direct them in the only way that can bring them

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to the final possession of it; as he was sent to be a pattern to all his followers, and give them an example how they might walk so as to please God, and secure his acceptance, being in his own character *holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*, always employed in his Father's work, and making it his meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him; as he performed the most miraculous works, in attestation of the truth of his doctrine, in confirmation of his divine mission, to convince the incredulous, to confirm his disciples, and persuade those, to whom he was in person sent, to receive and believe in him as the promised Messiah; and as at last he sealed the truth of his pretensions and doctrines with his blood, died in obedience to his Father's will, and with the utmost confidence in his acceptance, died through the abundance of his grace, and the strength of his benevolence to men, shewing his compassion in the last moments of his life, by praying for their forgiveness who unrighteously destroyed him; dying with the most exemplary patience and resignation to his Father's pleasure, as an encouragement to them that were afterwards to die in his cause, and learning experimentally, by the things he suffered, compassion for his suffering followers, and a more tender concern to help and succour them under all their temptations and trials, to which they might be exposed for his name and cause.

But as the death of Christ is of peculiar importance in the christian scheme, the knowledge of Christ implies a right acquaintance with the reasons, and ends, and effects of his death; *that I may know him*, saith the apostle, *and the fellowship of his sufferings*, i. e. may be made partaker of his sufferings, or so understand the design of them, as to share in the fruits and happy effects

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of them ; *being made conformable to his death, viz.* by being dead to sin, and crucified, as it were, as to my flesh, with all the evil affections and passions of it. And to know his death in the gospel representation of it, is, I think, to know that he *died the just for the unjust*, that he *bear our sins*, i. e. the punishment of our sins, on the tree ; that he died as a sacrifice for sin, a sacrifice of God's special preparation and appointment, and that his death was regarded and accepted as a sacrifice, and offering of *a sweet smelling savour* by God ; that he offered himself to God as *a real sacrifice*, for the life of the world ; that it was a sacrifice of the highest intrinsic dignity and worth, the sacrifice of a life most valuable in its nature, and of one that was nearest and dearest to God ; that it had every circumstance of moral worth to recommend it, was voluntarily made, without blemish or spot, without a single defect to depreciate its value, sanctified by the most perfect obedience, and sprinkled with the most acceptable incense of absolute and unlimited resignation, and for these reasons highly pleasing and acceptable to God ; that it was a sacrifice of *real propitiation* on the behalf of sinners, and to take away sin, in as strict a sense as the sacrifices of atonement under the law, as it was the grand assurance of God's being reconcileable, and the medium thro' which alone God was determined to grant mercy and forgiveness, and the consideration that rendered the extending mercy to sinners worthy the character of God as the moral governor of the world, and reconcileable with the great ends of his administration and kingdom ; that on this account his death was the *λυτρον*, the ransom of men, the price of their redemption, and the real purchase of all the benefits and blessings of salvation, because he hereby obtained and purchased
for

for himself all the rights, priviledges, honours and powers of redeemer, or of conferring those invaluable blessings, in which our redemption consists; on which account these blessings are expressly said to be derived to us in consequence of his death. *For in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins; we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.* Our redemption from the vanity of a sinful conversation is by the same precious blood of Christ; the *purging our consciences from dead works*, i. e. freeing our minds from those guilty apprehensions and fears, that arise in us through a consciousness of sin, is by the blood of Christ; *by his death he hath destroyed him who had the power of death, and thus delivered us from bondage through the fear of it; God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him, and we have boldness to enter into the holiest itself by the blood of Jesus.* In a word, he hath by one offering of himself for ever perfected them that are sanctified. So that to know Christ, and the fellowship of his sufferings, is to know, that all the privileges and blessings that accompany salvation, and our final admission into heaven itself, and our redemption unto God, are all communicated to us, and bestowed upon us, as the proper purchase and immediate reward of the death and sufferings of Christ.

And as he is made of God to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, by virtue of those sacred offices which he sustains and executes; so to know Christ farther implies, a due apprehension of the characters with which he is invested, and the several relations in which he stands

towards us. Had he continued under the power of death, the great vindication of his own character would have been wanting, and he would have been incapable of procuring redemption for others from the power of it; and therefore to know Christ is to know *the power of his resurrection*, the truth and certainty of it, the power that effected it, the intentions and purposes of it, the influence it should have upon ourselves, and the glory that followed it, in his advancement to the right hand of God, *far above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*; from whence he shed down the promised spirit in the extraordinary and miraculous gifts of it on the apostles and first christians, and continues to bestow it on all that humbly and sincerely ask it, as the spirit of truth, faith, grace, holiness, and strength, as the sanctifier of their hearts, and as the great and efficacious principle of the divine and spiritual life, by which they who believe are to walk and live, in opposition to the instincts and appetites of their animal natures, and by whose influence and power they are to bring forth the sacred fruits of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and temperance, and enabled to rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and where he must reign *till all his enemies are put under him*, and lives as *head over all things to the church, which is his body, and the fullness of him that filleth all in all*, and which owns him as her *one only Lord*, her great and only authoritative instructor in the things of religion and salvation; and where he appears as *the great high-priest of our profession*, and is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, because he lives for ever to make intercession for them; acts as an advocate with
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the Father for all repenting believing sinners, dwells as *their forerunner* in heaven, to prepare the mansions of glory for them, is their one *only mediator* with God, by and through whom they have access to the Father, with whom he must continue, till the solemn important transaction of the universal judgment shall take place, over which he is to preside, and for the carrying on of which he *shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.*

In a word, he who knows Christ, as he is represented to us in the gospel revelation, will consider him as interested in the whole scheme of the gospel redemption, which in all its parts relates to him, was founded in his mediation, in the first draught and plan of it in the eternal counsels of God, and which as to its execution, from the first beginning, through its gradual progress, to the final completion of it, is accomplished by him as the great agent in it; insomuch that all the interests of God and man were committed to his care and management, and nothing transacted in reference to God's glory, the erection of his kingdom, and the salvation of his people, but under his conduct and direction.; *it having pleased the Father* for this purpose, *that all fullness should dwell in him, even all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yea all the fullness of the godhead bodily, or substantially, rendering him equal to this arduous and glorious employment, and that there might be no failure in the execution of any part of it, thro' a failure of power, or defect of wisdom in him to whom it was committed; and that on this account he might in all things have the pre-eminence, be entitled to the homage and worship of the*

John xiv.
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the angels, be honoured by all men; even as *they honour the Father*; and in a word, that *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father*, that thus, as our Lord himself expresses it, *the Father may be glorified in the Son*.

And thus have I set before you a brief summary of what is comprehended in this knowledge of Christ, and which was esteemed of that importance and value by the inspired apostle, as that *he counted all things but loss in comparison of the excellency of it*. And if we are blessed with the possession of this knowledge, if we have been taught the truth as it is in Jesus, and have any competent understanding of the scheme of christianity, as represented to us in the sacred records, we shall find a very high esteem for it arising in our breasts, look on it as an invaluable treasure, and be thankful to God, that he hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of this glorious knowledge of God in the face of Christ, i. e. in those discoveries he hath made of God by the revelation of his gospel, which are as clear, as though we beheld him face to face, and had conversed with him in person, and received our instructions immediately from him. But this leads me to the second general.

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which is to know is life eternal.

II. Which is to represent to you the peculiar and invaluable excellency of this knowledge; and there are many things that offer themselves to my thoughts. I can but just mention a few of them.

It is the most exalted and dignifying knowledge we can be in the pursuit and possession of, the subjects of which have been, many of them, the study and inquiry of the wisest and best of men,

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in all ages and nations of the world. There are no subjects we can employ our thoughts on so glorious, as those which christianity holds up to our contemplation, and which every christian as such is habitually conversant with; God in all his perfections, the Son of God in all the various parts of his character and mediation, the spirit of God in all his influences, gifts and graces; the worship due to God, the obedience he requires, and the nature of that religion which is acceptable to God; the works he hath made, the providence he exercises, the favours he hath conferred, the redemption he offers us, the realities of a future life, the glory we may expect, and the condemnation and punishment we have therein to fear and guard against. These are subjects of the most sacred and venerable nature, our capacities to understand them is a demonstration of the superiour dignity of the reasonable soul, and the actual attainment of the right knowledge of them, creates an intrinsick worth of character, really assimilates men in their measure to God, and renders them truly worthy of veneration and esteem.

It is a necessary and extreamly interesting part of knowledge. All parts of science are valuable only in proportion to the concern we have in them, and the good uses we can make of them; and there are many branches of it, which tho' they may serve for amusement, or may be somewhat ornamental to human nature, or may be peculiarly adapted to persons of a curious speculative temper, yet men may be wholly ignorant of, without prejudice to their character as reasonable creatures, as moral agents, and accountable beings, and which therefore they can be under no kind of necessity of entering into the pursuit of. But the knowledge of Christ is necessary, necessary for all that can attain it, necessary to the most valuable
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purposes, necessary to answer the ends of their natures, and secure their hopes of attaining to the highest felicity of it. Every man hath a necessary relation to and dependence on God, and therefore to know him, what he is, what his pleasure concerning us, what we have to fear and what to hope from him, is a part of knowledge that no man can be without, reconcileable with his duty, or consistent with his interest. 'Tis of no great importance to the ends of life, that I should measure the distances, calculate the magnitude and motions of the heavenly bodies, account for those motions by mechanical laws, or exactly determine how that system, of which our world is a part, is adjusted, -with regard to the position of the several globes that constitute it; but 'tis of the utmost importance to me to know, whether this system was necessary, eternal and self-existent, or the effect of chance, or the production of a wise, and intelligent, and benevolent agent, who is every where present in it, sustains it by his power, and exercises a constant providence over all the works of his hands. In this I am deeply interested, because my own conduct, welfare and happiness are immediately concerned in the judgment I form in reference to them. Mathematical speculations fall to the share of but few, and 'tis of no great moment whether they understand, or can demonstrate one single mathematical proposition. The world will subsist, and the general peace and welfare of it be secured, and every individual may know his duty, and attain the ends of his being, whether he understands more or less, or nothing in this celebrated part of science. But religious and moral enquiries are of the utmost consequence; to know whence, and what we are, what we are intended for, the connections we have, the relations we stand in, the fitness and propriety of conduct, what

what our happiness, and how we may attain it, how long we are to exist, and where our future existence shall be; high and low, rich and poor, men of all ranks, characters and conditions in the world, have an equal stake in these particulars, and every valuable interest of their being depends on their forming some just apprehensions of them. To enter into the mechanism of the human body, to know the situation, connexion, uses of its several parts, and to be able to account by proper laws for all the various functions of the animal life, is undoubtedly a pleasing branch of knowledge, and may be applied to many useful purposes. But still the heart will play, the pulse will beat, the bowels continue their motion, and the whole machine work on regularly, whether we can enter into the contrivance of it or not; and there is nothing of any importance depends on *the general knowledge* of it. But to know whether my whole composition is material, whether I have a spiritual and immortal principle in me; what uses its rational powers are intended for; what its disorders, and how they may be cured; what its proper furniture, and how it may be obtained; what its danger, and how it may be prevented; whence its happiness, and how it may be secured; these are enquiries every wise and prudent man knows he is obliged to enter into, and it must be the height of folly and madness to be indifferent to, and void of all solicitude about them. And indeed the whole of christianity, in all its principles and obligations, in the whole contexture and frame of it, claims and deserves our most serious attention, upon account of its innate and eternal importance; and if proper means be necessary to knowledge, and if as to truths of universal importance, the knowledge of them is universally necessary, the best and surest means

of obtaining this knowledge must be most necessary, and universally necessary; and therefore the knowledge of Christ is in some measure universally necessary, because 'tis the only means of attaining the knowledge of these universally necessary truths, on the belief of which the present welfare and final happiness of mankind have so intire a dependence.

The excellency of this knowledge farther appears, in that it is calculated for and attainable by all, who have the gospel revelation, and honestly make use of the means that God hath directed them to for their conviction and information. The learned and unlearned, the wise and simple, men of leisure and business, men of the highest and lowest classes in life, for external circumstances, or intellectual abilities, may all be adepts in this sacred science, in every thing necessary for them to understand. There are indeed the deep and the plain things of God; and tho' men of greater leisure, higher abilities, and better means of improvement, will find employment enough, and subjects sufficient to exercise them, in the more speculative and difficult questions, that christianity may furnish; yet the plainest things are generally the most important and necessary, and there is nothing on which the duty and salvation of the meanest man depends, but what is obvious and clear, and may be fully apprehended by him, as far as he can be concerned and obliged to understand it, if he searches with integrity, and with a due sense of his need of divine instruction, and earnestly desires and prays for it. And though many disputes have unhappily entered into the christian church, yet revelation still remains as it did; tho' men have bewildered themselves, they have not been able to obscure that; and strip the doctrines of Christ from
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from the philosophy that hath been mixt with them, consider them in the simplicity in which they stand as taught by the inspired writers, and the great distinguishing outlines of them will appear to all, and what is essential and most important in them, will be obvious to men of the plainest sense, and generally carry its own conviction along with it.

The doctrine of *election* hath been made a very thorny and difficult point; and yet there is no man of common sense, but instantly perceives upon the first mention of it, that as eternal life must be the gift of God, it is impossible he can ever obtain it, unless God is determined to give it him, *i. e.* unless God elect or choose him to the possession of it. Many disputes have arose about *the corruption* of human nature; and yet nothing is more evident than that it must be introduced by the first offender, hath passed from him through all the various successions of his posterity, and every man, I imagine, finds somewhat of it in himself; and if he be a wise man, will be much more concerned how to cure it, than busy and solicitous to know how he came by it. Large volumes have been wrote, I wish I could say to explain the doctrine of *justification*; and yet 'tis what every man knows, that an offender, who hath forfeited his life, can be restored to life and fortune only by the undeserved favour of his prince; and 'tis a principle of natural religion, that an offender against God can have no claim to forgiveness, but from the unmerited grace of God; and that therefore the justification of sinners, *i. e.* the forgiveness of their past sins, their full restoration to the divine acceptance, and an interest in the promise of eternal life, can, as to such, in no sense be the claim of past works, or due in justice to any former piety or virtue;

for if that were the case, and they could really urge such a claim, they would have no need of the gospel justification, which supposes men sinners, destitute of the claim to life and happiness, and restored to both only by the unmerited grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ. The doctrine of *imputed righteousness*, i. e. of the righteousness of Christ so reckoned to our account, as that we by reason of it are intitled to pardon, favour, acceptance with God, and the blessing of eternal life, is too strong for the digestion of some weak and delicate stomachs. And yet what more true in theory, what more frequently confirmed by fact, what more universally allowed and acknowledged, than the two principles, on which this disputed article depends: *viz.* that the good effects of one person's merit may reach far beyond himself, and be very extensively beneficial to others; and that these very beneficial effects may reflect back, and contribute greatly to the reward, honour and happiness of the person to whose merits they are owing. Thus a father's merits are often imputed to, *i. e.* placed to the account of, and derive hereditary honours to his family, and he himself is rewarded in the reverſionary privileges conferred upon his poſterity. 'Twould be easy to multiply instances of this kind; but I shall only add, that if serious and pious christians of all denominations could but get a little free from their prejudices, their attachment to particular words and phrases, and their suspicions and jealousies concerning those, who they imagine differ from them; if they would but explain each others different expressions with candour, consider what on each side is disavowed in the several articles they respectively espouse, and calmly, as God gave them opportunity, represent their real sentiments to each other; I am confident

dent that in all the main things they would find themselves much more generally agreed than they imagined, and that though there might remain some lesser differences about *the philosophy* of these doctrines, there would be no considerable ones about *the christianity* of them, *i. e.* in any thing that christianity hath made necessary for a man to believe concerning them, in order to do his duty, to please God, to save his soul, and finally to get safe to the heavenly happiness and glory. And I speak this the more freely, without courting the favour, or fearing the displeasure of any man, or party of men, from a thorough consideration of the nature of the christian doctrine, and the fullest conviction and even experience of the truth of what I say; and in honour of the doctrine of Christ itself, which I am persuaded shines with a clear light, and conveys one plain uniform scheme of truth, in all its grand articles, even where there is often an appearance of the greatest diversity. And lastly

'Tis a farther recommendation of this knowledge of Christ, that wherever it dwells, and the principles of it are steadily believed, it produceth the most excellent and valuable effects. Mere speculation is of little worth, and those branches of science, that have no considerable good influence, and are not calculated to produce any fruits of importance, are of small consequence to human nature, and are not worth the labour and pains of a continual search after. But here the knowledge of Christ is, beyond all exception and parallel, excellent; and if it is not always, and in all who profess to understand it, attended with its proper fruits, 'tis not owing to any defect in the principles themselves, but either to their being mistaken, or not firmly believed, or not impressed on the heart and conscience by serious attention, con-

consideration and prayer. The sacred writings ascribe the noblest influence and efficacy to faith, that is, to truth understood and believed. Knowledge is indeed the ground-work of all religion, and the foundation of the divine and spiritual life. As light was the first production of God in the natural creation, so 'tis in the moral and spiritual one. And how vast and beneficial is the change in the soul produced by this sacred illumination, when the truths of God appear in their proper light, and full conviction ! In how different a view doth a man consider himself, his God, his Saviour, and almost every object that is around him ! How friendly and warm are the convictions it raises in him, what apprehensions doth it awaken, what hopes doth it inspire, what desires doth it raise, what new dispositions doth it create, what holy resolutions doth it excite, what caution and care doth it spread over his mind, what resolution and constancy doth it introduce, and to what diligence and vigour doth it quicken him ! It is immediately calculated to produce the fear and love of God, an hatred of evil, and the approbation of the good and holy and acceptable will of God. It is the source of all true and acceptable devotion, and furnishes motives to engage men to worship God in the manner he requires. It is an acquisition truly honourable in itself, as it gives to our head an ornament of grace, and compasseth us with a crown of glory, and renders men partakers of the image of God ; for as christians we are to put on that *new man, which is created in knowledge after the image of him that created him.* It is a knowledge peculiarly pleasant to the soul, and furnishes a thousand sources of the most grateful and delightful reflections. It is a safe and sure guide through the worst dangers and snares of life, the eye that is to direct the soul, the light that

that is to guide us in all our paths, and in following of which we cannot possibly err; so that we shall walk in our way safely, when we go with it *our steps shall not be straitned, and when we run we shall not stumble.* It is one of the best preservatives against the power and influence of temptation, as it forewarns men of their danger, renders them cautious and wary, checks their passions and affections, creates in them the surest dependencies, teaches them whence to derive that grace that is sufficient for them, and inspires them with a resolution, firmness and strength of mind, superior to all the difficulties that may encompass them. It not only enlightens, but purifies the heart, and is the powerful means of our sanctification. It is the root of obedience to God, and when we are *filled with the knowledge of Christ, we shall walk worthy of the Lord unto all well pleasing; it is pure and peaceable, and gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.* It creates hope and trust in God; for if we are so happy as to get this knowledge, *when thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid, yea thou shalt lie down and thy sleep shall be sweet. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.* It inspires serenity and comfort of mind, and what the apostle wishes and prays for in behalf of those to whom he wrote, *Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord,* shall be the happiness of those, who are blessed with it, and are careful rightly to improve it. It will be the support of the sincere christians mind in the prospect and approach of death, as it will strengthen his faith, cherish his hope, clear up his prospects, and present to his view the glory, honour and immortality that is before him. It is a preparative for heaven, which is the world
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of knowledge, and if we are *not barren and unfruitful in this knowledge of Christ*, we shall have an *entrance administred to us abundantly into the heavenly kingdom and glory*. In a word, the happy fruit and consequence of this knowledge, wherever it forms the temper, and hath its due influence upon the life, is *the winning or gaining Christ*, the securing his favour and acceptance, and an interest in all the purchased benefits of redemption; the being finally *found in him*, justified by the grace of God through faith in him, according to God's appointed method of justification, influenced by the power of his resurrection to awake to righteousness, and walk before God in all newness of life, and being made conformable unto his death, by our final deliverance from death, and attaining to the resurrection of the dead. I hope enough hath been said,

1. To fix and heighten your esteem for this knowledge of Christ, to make you thankful to God for the means of it, to excite you to endeavour to grow in it, and to engage you to the strictest care to improve it. There cannot be a more valuable treasure put into our hands, by the providence and favour of God, than the gospel revelation, and the sacred records which contain it; which for the subjects they treat of, and the manner in which they represent them, can never be too highly esteemed by us. Even abstracting from their character of being divinely inspired, and containing a revelation from God, they have many intrinsick characters, that render them highly venerable, and above all other writings truly worthy our regard. Many of the books that constitute our scripture, are indisputably by far the most ancient of any now extant in the whole world, and in the accounts they give, they rise as high as the creation of the universe, shew us the original and formation of man, the law of
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his creation, the dignity of his first condition, the manner how he lost it, the causes that introduced death, and the sources of all the various miseries to which he is continually subjected. They all of them contain the history of providence, and that not merely in reference to a single nation, but to the principal nations and kingdoms of the earth; shewing the causes by which they rise to prosperity and strength, and that occasion their fall and ruine, both in a natural way, and from the over-ruling power and providence of God himself. They contain the history of religion from the earliest origin of things, through a series of some thousand years, and of the various corruptions of it, amongst the principal nations of the earth. They establish that first principle of all religion, the being of one God, and give those descriptions of his natural and moral perfections, that are agreeable to the plainest principles of reason, and that for sublimity and grandure of sentiment, for elegance and force of description, have nothing in the most celebrated writings of antiquity to equal them. What they describe as true religion is of immutable excellency and worth, and the rules of moral virtue are in every respect unexceptionable and compleat. And on these and other accounts, they contain a fund of knowledge, extremely important in itself, and that is no where else to be found throughout the whole habitable world; and nothing but ignorance and folly can despise them. But then consider them as a revelation from God, and containing an account of the fall, corruption and ruine of mankind, the means and methods of their recovery, and as relating, from the beginning to the end, to that glorious and illustrious personage, that was to be employed in the sacred and benevolent work of their redemption,

and the methods fixed for the restoration of sinners to the integrity and dignity of their nature, the reinstating them in the forfeited favour of God, and securing them the possession of eternal happiness; this gives them a worth and importance, that no other writings can have, and renders it both our duty and interest, to study them with the utmost care, for our own instruction and information.

2. What an abhorrence should this excite in us for that false religion, which conceals this knowledge from men, makes it a capital crime to use the proper means to obtain it, and which supports itself by ignorance, and secures that ignorance possession, and dominion, by the most execrable cruelties! The fundamental maxim of that religion, upon which the whole structure of it is supported, is that *ignorance is the mother of devotion*, and that 'tis dangerous for the people to *know too much*. And they are in the right so far, as that what they call devotion can be maintained by nothing but the most stupid ignorance, and the utter absence of all true knowledge; which, wherever it hath prevailed, hath discovered the falsehood and imposture of their impositions, and caused nations and kingdoms to throw off their superstitions and idolatries with abhorrence. And therefore 'tis extremely dangerous to them that men should know too much, because the prevalence of knowledge puts an immediate end to their tyranny and craft, and the more men know, the more will they hate and detest the corruptions of religion they have introduced, and the pageantries and impieties they have established in the room of the plain and spiritual worship of God. And there cannot be a surer evidence of the badness of any cause, than its refusal to come to the light, and submit to an honest and impartial examination;

amination ; and 'tis a demonstration that the supporters of such a cause suspect the goodness of it, or rather know that 'tis false and indefensible. The idolatries and vices of the heathen world were owing to the darkness of their understanding, and their being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their hearts. And the same cause will ever produce the same effect. Keep men ignorant, and you prepare them for the worst deceptions, and make them a prey to every crafty and interested seducer. They will naturally also grow vicious in consequence of their ignorance ; for if they have no solid principles of truth to restrain their appetites, they will follow wherever their passions call and prompt them ; and if they have been brought up to the belief of principles evidently false, and that are favourable to their sinful inclinations and practices, their recovery from them is morally impossible, and under the shelter and countenance of such principles, all exhortations to repentance and reformation must, in the nature of things, without a miracle, be wholly ineffectual. And therefore the taking away the key of knowledge from mankind, is an impiety and wickedness of the most criminal nature, as it is depriving them of the light, which is necessary to purify and direct them, to lead them into their duty, and guide them to their happiness. It is the character of sincere christians, that they *are light in the Lord*, and for this purpose the gospel revelation was vouchsafed to the world, that we might be taught of God, and be made wise to the salvation of our souls ; and therefore to be *darkness in the Lord* can never be the mark of a true christian, and to prevent mens being taught of God, and instructed by his gospel in the way of salvation, can't be the mark

of a true church ; and therefore the church of *Rome*, which hinders the glorious light of the gospel of God from shining into the hearts of men, must be an antichristian church ; and if she had no other mark of apostacy on her, but this single one, that she kept men in darkness and ignorance, and prevented them under the severest penalties from examining into the nature of her doctrine and worship, this of itself would be proof sufficient, that whatever other name belonged to her, she could not deserve the name of the church of Christ. And indeed this practice of hers is such an insult upon the common sense and reason of mankind, and so intirely calculated to corrupt and ruin them, as that one would indeed wonder how nations and kingdoms could ever be brought to submit to, or remain easy under it. They who know the worth of knowledge, and especially the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, will never want motives to be thankful to God for the privilege of enjoying it, nor to excite in them the warmest zeal to maintain and perpetuate it.

3. What reason have we to adore the good providence of God, that hath rescued us from that ignorance, which for many ages overspread these nations, and hath blessed us with the clear light of his gospel, and the freest liberty of consulting it, and drawing refreshment from this pure fountain of living waters ; and who, by many miraculous steps of his good providence, hath prevented the return of this *Egyptian* darkness from overwhelming us. Our persecuted brethren abroad, what would they not give for our privileges, could they sit down, and quietly enjoy, and walk by the heavenly light that surrounds us ! Our enemies, who hate it, hate us for possessing it ; and have used all the arts, that malice and subtlety could devise, to extinguish it in the

the midst of us. This hath been attempted by *the throne* itself, when possessed by a weak and furious bigot for the cause of ignorance and superstition. But happily for us, God made him *abdicate* to preserve us, and because the light of knowledge was offensive to his eyes, and the possession of liberty by others grievous to his heart, sent him to a land, where there were neither liberty nor knowledge enough, the two things he *mortally hated*, to offend him. The glorious prince, that supplied his place, released our forefathers from their fears, and to prevent, as far as human policy and wisdom could do it, the return of popish tyranny and barbarity to these kingdoms, obtained that settlement of the crown in the present royal family, which we trust in God shall never be interrupted. The two princes of it, that have possessed the crown, have done honour to it, and though they have been both struck at by unnatural and unprovoked rebellions, yet *have our eyes seen our desire upon their and our enemies*, and God hath made their attempts to subvert the throne, the means of its more firm and secure establishment. The present possessor of it deserves our warmest gratitude and affection for his love of liberty, his care of the publick welfare, his strict regard to our laws, and the blessings of an uninterrupted equitable and righteous government. And as his life is peculiarly valuable in the present situation of our affairs, every one that wishes well to his country, himself, and his posterity, will be solicitous for the continuance of it, and every good man will most ardently pray that God will long preserve it; and so establish the prosperity of his reign, as that whilst he is pleased to continue it, it may be more and more honourable and easy to himself, and accompanied with the most

most substantial blessings to all that live under it.

4. Consider the nature of this sacred knowledge, and remember that 'tis not merely notional and speculative, but influential and transforming, and that in order to our receiving any benefit by it, it must not only furnish the head, but reach and purify the heart, form men into the divine temper, and enable them to live the divine life. There is undoubtedly such a thing as erring in principle fundamentally; but 'tis a grievous and dangerous mistake to imagine, that errors in judgment and belief are the only capital and fundamental ones. Errors in temper, errors in conduct, may be as dangerous and pernicious as any in speculation can possibly be; and not only he denies the Lord that bought him, who through a bad heart may deny any one of the principal doctrines, relating to his person and mediation; but he also as truly, who by the indulged prevalence of any sinful passions and ungovernable appetites, and an habitually sensual sinful life, denies the authority of, and renounces his subjection to the government of the Lord Jesus Christ. For one of the principal doctrines relating to Christ is, that he *hath redeemed us from all iniquity, and bought us with the price of his precious blood from the vanity of a sinful conversation*; and therefore he who continues in sin, and runs on habitually in these criminal vanities, whatever may be his pretensions to truth, renounces in fact this redemption of Christ, and openly declares by his actions, that Christ hath not thus bought and purchased him from this evil world, and the corruptions that abound in it; and thus appears to err capitally in judgment. Or if his inward principles are better than his practice, he is marked out for ruin and vengeance by that awful declaration of the

the inspired apostle: *The wrath of God is revealed Rom. i. from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.* 18.

Be not therefore, Christians, only concerned about truth of principle, but truth of character and conduct. A *sound judgment* and a *good life* should be inseparable companions, and *if we know the great things of christianity, happy are we if we do them.* There is nothing in Christianity of importance but what is practical, and the whole doctrine of the gospel is according to godliness. Impress therefore the great truths you believe upon your hearts, by meditation and serious prayer to God. Earnestly implore both the enlightening and renewing influences of the good spirit of God, that you may not be barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of God and Christ, for thus an entrance shall be ministred to you abundantly into his kingdom and glory. Lastly,

5. If this knowledge be so truly excellent, how ambitious should we all be, in our several stations, and according to our respective abilities and opportunities, to spread the lustre, and convey the glorious light of it amongst others. Christians are, by their profession, and their whole conduct, obliged to cause their light so to shine before men, as that they seeing their good works, may glorify their father which is in heaven; and to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, amongst whom they are to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; retaining this quickning light in their own minds, and walking by the sacred influence and guidance of it themselves, and hereby causing others to behold and admire the lustre of it, open their hearts to receive it, and put themselves under the infallible direction of it. But men
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need instruction as well as example; and though the means of knowledge, through the abundant grace of God, are numerous in these kingdoms, yet many are destitute of them, and almost as intirely ignorant, as though the day spring from on high had never visited them, and dwell in as thick darkness, as though the sun of righteousness had never risen on them, to purify and heal them. Bred up to poverty and labour, and too frequently amongst examples of ignorance, vice and folly, they have never understood the worth of knowledge, never had any thirst and desire after it, often slight all the publick means of it, have frequently nothing to spare of what they purchase by their daily labour, to furnish themselves with more private helps; and if they could, know not what helps to choose, or how to fix on such as are most suited to their circumstances, and best adapted to promote in them that knowledge which they want. The care therefore of furnishing them with these helps is properly the province of others, that are wiser and more experienced, who know something of books, and such as are fit to be put into their hands. The Bible stands at the head of all others, and is fit to be entrusted with every one, who is capable of reading; and all others are of no value, any farther than as they tend to render the knowledge of the bible more easy, and to explain and enforce the necessary truths of it. These therefore should be always plain, and generally short; books, not of controversy, but of a quite serious turn, and calculated as far as possibly can be to inform them in things level to their capacities, that may most effectually conduce to promote the real power and life of godliness, to convince them of their sins, to shew them their need of a Saviour, to awaken them to take refuge in his power and grace,

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to render them useful in their stations, industrious for their families, faithful as good subjects, firm protestants upon principle, and diligent in the use of all appointed means, for the improvement of their minds, and more effectually securing their own salvation.

The worthy society, who have called me to this service, are united for the more effectual and extensive distribution of these kinds of books; and the charity is truly christian and laudible, and the scheme they have formed, well adapted to promote very useful and valuable purposes. The spreading of divine knowledge, the bringing men to an acquaintance with and reverence for God, the promoting in them the love of and subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ, the rendering them good and useful in their stations, and the making them wise to salvation; is a most excellent design and attempt, 'tis being in the stead of God and Christ to men, 'tis promoting God's glory, and the interests of Christ's kingdom, 'tis doing what all who are thus benefited will esteem and love you for, and may furnish many of them reasons for blessing God on your account through all eternity. And who that is a christian would not love to be thus employed? who that knows the inestimable value of the knowledge of Christ, would not be ambitious of spreading it, and glory in being the instrument of God's mercy, in preventing the destruction of one soul, for whom Christ died, for want of knowledge; and though all cannot be pastors and teachers, yet all of you are capable of spreading the light of knowledge, by putting the means of it into the hands of others; and a society united for this purpose, is, in my judgment, much more capable of being extensively useful this way, than any private person can be; because

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much larger supplies may be expected from a society and their interest, than what private persons can generally afford; their correspondence is larger, and they are therefore much more likely to know how these kind of books may be most properly distributed; and what is worthy consideration, such a distribution becomes, not a casual accidental thing, but a proper business, and even necessary duty, by the managers of the society. And 'tis the constant attention to any good service, that is the proper way to render it really and extensively useful.

It therefore gave me great pleasure when first I heard of such a society's being formed, as the design of it is intrinsically good, and as it stands in a noble opposition to those societies and clubs, that associate to promote infidelity and vice, or meet to carry on unprofitable and dangerous disputations. I liked it the better, as I found it generally composed of younger persons, and was thankful to God, who directed them into the design, and put it into their hearts, at an age of pleasure and diversion, to be not only careful of their own happiness, but generously solicitous for the salvation of others. And I also further highly approved it, as it was formed upon an healing catholick plan, in which all our denominations are united, all of them agreeing to distribute the best of all books, the bible as their principal one, and such others only as all of them can unite and center in. The rules of the society are in general well chosen and prudent, the management hath been faithful and careful, and carried on with great candour and mutual harmony. Their encouragement hath been considerable, and they with pleasure and gratitude to God acknowledge their success, and ask now for the farther assistance of this assembly, only to gratify a generous

nerous passion, of making many others acquainted with the truths they themselves believe, helping them to practise those duties, which by the grace of God they are determined steadily to perform, and assisting them in working out that salvation, which is the object of their own desire and hope. Help them therefore to execute so kind a view, and strengthen their hearts and their hands in so generous a work. The light of that sacred knowledge which you, and this society, are the instruments of spreading, will cheer your own hearts, and warm them with the sincerest pleasure. Expences this way will all sit well upon reflection, and in the most serious moments of our lives never be regretted. Only be careful, that whilst you are endeavouring to convey light to others, you walk as children of the light yourselves. Let your examples shine, and adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour, that doctrine which is according to godliness, by an exemplary undissembled piety, and by all the genuine fruits of real righteousness. And may the God of grace prosper your design, by your means manifest the favour of his knowledge in many places, that being saved yourselves, you may be the honoured happy instruments of saving others, and you and they finally rejoice together in the day of Christ.

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